

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A user authentication method for an authentication server which executes user authentication between a mobile information terminal and a content providing server interconnected by an open network ~~not guaranteeing the security of data to be transferred~~, comprising the steps of:

registering unique identification information corresponding to the hardware of ~~stored in~~ said mobile information terminal with a customer database of said authentication server in advance, wherein said unique identification information is stored in said mobile information terminal and comprises information identifying a manufacturer of the mobile information terminal;

decoding the unique identification information encrypted by a predetermined encryption algorithm and supplied from said mobile information terminal via said open network;

determining whether the unique identification information decoded in the decoding step is registered with said customer database; and

sending a notification to said content providing server that starting of service provision for said mobile information terminal be permitted, if the unique identification information is found registered with said customer database in the determining step.

Claim 2 (Original): The user authentication method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of:

presenting, to said mobile information terminal, a recommended menu including site access information for accessing a plurality of predetermined content providing servers;

wherein a process in which site access information selected by a user of said mobile information terminal from said recommended menu displayed on said mobile information terminal is registered with said customer database in relation with the unique identification information of said mobile information terminal is included in the registering step.

Claim 3 (Original): The user authentication method according to claim 2, wherein, in the registering step, when registering said site access information with said customer database, user authentication is performed on the basis of said unique identification information before this registration and said mobile information terminal is requested to make display for prompting said user to enter a password of the user, while, if, subsequent to the registration with said customer database, an access request is made on the basis of the site access information already registered with said customer database, the user authentication on the basis of said unique identification information is performed but the request for the display for prompting the user to enter the user's password is omitted.

Claim 4 (Original): The user authentication method according to claim 3, wherein, in the registering step, a charging server is instructed to charge said user for the use of a service provided by said content providing server associated with said site access information at the time of registering said site access information with said customer database.

Claim 5 (Original): The user authentication method according to claim 4, wherein, in the registering step, a confirmation step for confirming, before instructing said charging server for the charging, that said user is a registered user of said charging server is included.

Claim 6 (Original): The user authentication method according to claim 1, wherein said open network is the Internet, through which the unique identification information is transmitted as encrypted by the predetermined encryption algorithm by a Web browser installed on said mobile information terminal.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): The user authentication method according to claim 6, wherein

the unique identification information is read, by said Web browser, from a flash memory installed on said mobile information terminal and the retrieved unique identification information is transmitted as encrypted by the predetermined encryption algorithm by said Web browser.

Claim 8 (Original): The user authentication method according to claim 7, wherein said predetermined encryption algorithm is SSL (Secure Socket Layer).

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): A user authentication server which executes user authentication between a mobile information terminal and a content providing server interconnected by an open network ~~not guaranteeing the security of data to be transferred,~~ comprising:

registering means for registering unique identification information corresponding to the hardware of ~~stored in~~ said mobile information terminal with a customer database of said authentication server in advance, wherein said unique identification information is stored in said mobile information terminal and comprises information identifying a manufacturer of the mobile information terminal;

decoding means for decoding the unique identification information encrypted by a predetermined encryption algorithm and supplied from said mobile information terminal via said open network;

determining means for determining whether the unique identification information decoded by the decoding means is registered with said customer database; and

service permission notice sending means for sending a notification to said content providing server that starting of service provision for said mobile information terminal be permitted, if the unique identification information is found registered with said customer database by the determining means.

Claim 10 (Original): The user authentication server according to claim 9, wherein said open network is the Internet, through which the unique identification information is transmitted as encrypted by the predetermined encryption algorithm by a Web browser installed on said mobile information terminal.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): The user authentication server according to claim 10, wherein

the unique identification information is read, by said Web browser, from a flash memory installed on said mobile information terminal and the retrieved unique identification information is transmitted as encrypted by the predetermined encryption algorithm by said Web browser.

Claim 12 (Original): The user authentication server according to claim 11, wherein said predetermined encryption algorithm is SSL.